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ERS Report Summary

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Household Food Security in the United States in 2010

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Most U.S. households have consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living—they are food secure. But a minority of American households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning that their access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. Food and nutrition assistance programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) increase food security by providing low-income households access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education. USDA monitors the extent and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households through an annual, nationally representative survey. Reliable monitoring of food security contributes to the effective operation of these programs as well as private food assistance programs and other government initiatives aimed at reducing food insecurity. This report presents statistics on households' food security, food expenditures, and use of food and nutrition assistance programs in 2010.

What Were the Study Findings?

The percentage of U.S. households that were food insecure remained essentially unchanged from 2009 to 2010, while the percentage with food insecurity in the severe range described as very low food security declined.

- In 2010, 85.5 percent of U.S. households were food secure throughout the year. The remaining 14.5 percent (17.2 million households) were food insecure. Food-insecure households (those with low and very low food security) had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. The change from the 2009 estimate (14.7 percent) was not statistically significant.
- In 2010, 5.4 percent of U.S. households (6.4 million households) had *very low food security*, a statistically significant decline from 5.7 percent in 2009. In these households, the food intake of some household members was reduced and normal eating patterns were disrupted due to limited resources. They comprised about one-third of all food-insecure households. Declines in the prevalence of very low food security were greatest for households with children, women living alone, and households with annual incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line.
- Children were food insecure at times during the year in 9.8 percent of households with children (3.9 million households), down from 10.6 percent in 2009. These households were unable at times during the year to provide adequate, nutritious meals for their children.

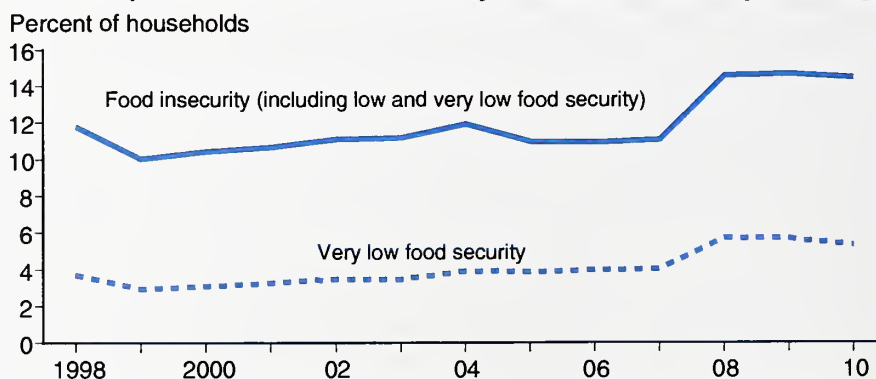
ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.

- While children are usually shielded from the disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake that characterize very low food security, both children and adults experienced instances of very low food security in 1.0 percent of households with children (386,000 households) in 2010, essentially unchanged from 1.2 percent in 2009. However, among households with children in which incomes were below 185 percent of the poverty line, the percentage with very low food security among children declined from 2.9 percent in 2009 to 2.1 percent in 2010.
- Rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average for households with incomes near or below the Federal poverty line, households with children headed by single women or single men, and Black and Hispanic households. Food insecurity was more common in large cities and rural areas than in suburban areas and other outlying areas around large cities.
- On a typical day, the number of households with very low food security was a small fraction of the number that experienced this condition “at some time during the year.” Typically, households classified as having very low food security experienced the condition in 7 months of the year, for a few days in each of those months.
- The typical food-secure household spent 27 percent more for food than the typical food-insecure household of the same size and composition, including food purchased with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly called food stamps).
- Fifty-nine percent of food-insecure households in the survey reported that in the previous month they had participated in one or more of the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs.

How Was the Study Conducted?

Data for the ERS food security reports come from an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau as a supplement to the monthly Current Population Survey. USDA sponsors the annual survey, and USDA’s Economic Research Service compiles and analyzes the responses. The 2010 food security survey covered 44,757 households comprising a representative sample of the U.S. civilian population of 119 million households. The food security survey asked one adult respondent in each household a series of questions about experiences and behaviors that indicate food insecurity, such as being unable to afford balanced meals, cutting the size of meals because of too little money for food, or being hungry because of too little money for food. The food security status of the household was assigned based on the number of food-insecure conditions reported.

The prevalence of very low food security declined from 2009 to 2010, while the prevalence of food insecurity remained essentially unchanged



Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service based on Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data.